

**CLAIMS**

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1. A continuous process for the manufacture of a fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product comprising the steps of:-
- (i) introducing a fat-based heat-meltable confectionery mixture into a low-shear extruder mixer (8),
  - (ii) introducing water into the low-shear extruder mixer (8),
  - (iii) mixing the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery mixture and water as they pass through the mixer (8) to form a fat-based heat-meltable confectionery composition, and
  - (iv) forming the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery composition into the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said low-shear extruder mixer (8) is a cavity-transfer type mixer.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the water is introduced into the mixer (8) in the form of an emulsion with oil.
4. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the emulsion is a water-in-oil emulsion.
5. A method as claimed in claim 3 or 4, wherein an emulsifier is included.
6. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein sufficient water is added such that the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product formed in step (iv) has a water content in the range of 1.8 to 3.0% by

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weight.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product formed in step (iv) has a water content in the range of 1.8 to 2.5% by weight.

8. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein steps (i) and (ii) are effected simultaneously.

9. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery mixture is a chocolate mixture.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein the chocolate mixture is tempered.

11. A method as claimed in claim 9 or 10, wherein the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery mixture is added to the mixer (8) at 27 to 45°C.

12. A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the mixer (8) is maintained at a temperature of 27 to 45°C.

13. A method as claimed in claim 10, wherein the tempered chocolate mixture is added to the mixer (8) at less than 30°C.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein the mixer (8) is maintained at less than 30°C.

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15. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein in step (ii), the water is added to the mixer (8) at 30 to 45°C.
16. A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein in step (ii), the water is added to the mixer (8) at 40°C.
17. A fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product prepared in accordance with the method of any one of claims 1 to 16.
18. A process for the manufacture of a fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product comprising the steps of:-
- (i) mixing a fat-based heat-meltable confectionery mixture whose fat component remains substantially liquid from its melting temperature to a temperature not exceeding 30°C and water in a mixer (8) to produce a fat-based heat-meltable confectionery composition, and
  - (ii) forming the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery composition into the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product.
19. A method as claimed in claim 18, wherein said fat component referred to in step (i) is liquid at less than 20°C.
20. A method as claimed in claim 18 or 19, wherein the mixer (8) in step (i) is a low-shear extruder mixer.
21. A method as claimed in claim 20, wherein said mixer (8) is a cavity transfer mixer.

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22. A method as claimed in any one of claims 18 to 21, wherein said fat component comprises one or more vegetable oils.

23. A method as claimed in claim 22, wherein said one or more vegetable oils are selected from the group consisting of sunflower, maize, groundnut, palm, palm kernel and coconut oils.

24. A method as claimed in claim 22 or 23, wherein said fat component oil(s) account(s) for at least 5% by weight of the fat-based heat-meltable confectionery mixture.

25. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein said fat component oil(s) account(s) for between 5% and 55% by weight.

26. A method as claimed in claim 25, wherein said fat component oil(s) account(s) for between 15 to 40% by weight.

27. A fat-based heat-meltable confectionery product prepared in accordance with the method of any one of claims 18 to 26.

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